

Reflective Practice in the Teaching of Civic Education in Secondary Schools in Zambia: A Case Study of Lusaka Province

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Abstract:

This study sought to establish the use of reflective practice in the teaching of Civic Education in secondary schools in Zambia. The theory of Conscientisation was applied in the study to understand how the process of reflection generates liberating knowledge in the teaching of Civic Education in secondary schools in Zambia. A descriptive case study design was used and data was collected using interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). Purposive sampling procedures were used to sample 73 participants. Data collected was analysed using themes that emerged from the objectives of the study. The study noted that reflective practice though rarely promoted by the teachers in their lessons was a significant aspect in teaching of Civic Education in secondary schools. The study also found that when applied correctly as an approach in teaching, reflective practice provides opportunities among the learners to engage in educational discussions during the lessons. Additionally, the study also noted that the use of reflective practice in teaching Civic Education in Secondary schools served as a good motivation for the learners to become active, responsible and informed members of society. Based on these findings, this study concludes that reflective practice as an approach of teaching serves to build self- esteem and confidence in learners and therefore the study recommends that the Ministry of General Education (MoGE) should take a deliberate move in providing workshops/short courses to Civic Education teachers so that they can enhance their skills in the use of reflective practice in Civic Education lessons.

Key words: Civic Education; Reflective Practice;
Conscientisation: Secondary Schools

Background and Context

First of all, it is important to note that this article is drawn from one of the objectives from my doctoral thesis and therefore the information that is provided for in the article is coming from the evidence that the participants provided during the study.

Studies done by different scholars such as Carretero et al. (2016); Magasu, Muleya & Mweemba (2020); Muleya (2019; 2018; 2017a; 2017b; 2016; 2015) and others have noted that Civic Education is one of the subjects in the school curricula that has attracted significant pedagogical innovations since the second half of the 21st Century. In this article we argue that reflective practice is also one such significant pedagogical innovation which undoubtedly needs to be embraced in the teaching of Civic Education in secondary schools. For instance, Likando (2019) notes that reflective practice has become one of the most classroom instructional strategies in many countries around the world. Scholars such as Ogene (2014) and Bransford et al. (2005) among many others have used synonyms such as critical thinking, inductive thinking, problem solving, analysis, reflective inquiry or reflective thinking to explain reflective practice.

Nonetheless, Finlay (2008) contends that reflective practice refers to a thinking process to learning. In other words, reflective practice is an approach to teaching that creates possibilities among the learners to think through the whole process of their learning. This means that reflective practice helps learners to have a deeper understanding of issues surrounding their society. Therefore, we argue that reflective practice provides an important possibility for teaching Civic Education in secondary schools in Zambia. This is in line with the revised curriculum of 2013 and the Civic Education syllabus where teachers have been encouraged to as much as possible to use methods which encourage the learners to think, reflect and do, rather than reproduce from rote learning. Essentially, the Outcome Based learning adopted in the revised curriculum authenticates the use of reflective practice. Therefore, reflective practice is a cornerstone in the teaching and learning process as it helps to develop reflective thinkers who contribute positively to

the affairs of society. If reflective practice is not embraced in Civic Education lessons, there will be poor learning outcomes as pupils will just be memorizing. Furthermore, the learners will be detached from political, social, economic and cultural life and thus, defeating the aim of the subject which is to consolidate democracy. This is supported by Moon (2004) who contends that reflection plays a part in good quality and is an important variable in developing appropriate learning behavior. In this study, classroom processes were seen as central to understanding the reflective practice. It is from this background that the study has been done to investigate reflective practice as a teaching strategy for improving the teaching of Civic Education in selected secondary schools of Lusaka Province in Zambia.

Theoretical Framework

This study was informed by the theory of Conscientisation as propounded by Freire (1970). Freire suggests that education should bring about enlightenment, empowerment and emancipation. In other words, Freire advocates for some reflection in the process of learning. He notes that Conscientisation has the potential to empower the learners to take collective action and eventually liberate themselves from the constraints of class and power. This entails that traditional hierarchies must be broken down and teachers must also be learners (particularly learning from their students) and being critically reflective about their practice to bring about Conscientisation. Additionally, Freire notes that learning is a social, political and pedagogical practice that takes place when people reach a deeper, richer, textured and nuanced understanding of themselves and their world. This in the thoughts of Freire is what constitutes reflective practice in the process of learning. This view is supported by Citizenship Education Foundation (2012) which observed that in whatever form Civic Education curriculum must have an active element that emphasises learning by doing, must be interactive by utilising discussion and debate and be relevant by focussing on real-life issues facing society.

In the light of this understanding, we adopted the theory of Conscientisation which is anchored on the principle of reflective practice because it points to critical issues that need to be addressed if the teaching of Civic Education in Secondary School is to be effective. Furthermore, the theory is in line with the aim of teaching Civic Education which is to impart relevant skills of rationality and evaluation which are key in consolidating democracy. One can also argue that Civic Education has the potential to produce informed citizens who are capable of using critical thinking skills in making intelligent decisions about everyday challenges of life based on critical awareness of the world based on concrete experience of their everyday lives. This is because studies done by Carretero et al (2016) and Goldberg et al (2011) have shown that Civic Education has the power to enlighten, emancipate and empower learners if taught in a reflective manner. This calls for teaching strategies that are participatory and provide an avenue to engage with societal affairs as reflected in the Zambia Education Curriculum Framework of 2013.

Methodology and Design

This study enlisted 73 participants drawn from Lusaka district. Fifty participants among them pupils were drawn from five selected secondary schools in Lusaka province namely: A, B, C, D and E. The secondary schools were purposively selected because they were among those secondary schools in Lusaka province where Civic Education was first taught in Zambia. Fifteen participants were teachers of Civic Education drawn from the five selected secondary schools in the province. Five were lecturers of Civic Education drawn from University Z and University Y, and other participants included officials from Curriculum Development Centre (CDC), Examination Council of Zambia (ECZ), Zambia Civic Education Association (ZCEA) and the Ministry of General Education (M.o.G.E). Of these participants, forty-four (44) were males and twenty-nine (29) were females. The youngest participant was 15 years old while the oldest was 56 years old. The study took a qualitative approach and employed

a descriptive case study design. Five secondary schools in Lusaka Province were selected as part of the target population. Purposive sampling techniques were employed to identify the participants. Interview guides were used to collect data from teachers, CDC, ECZ and MoGE while FGDs were used to collect data from pupils. Data from interviews and FGDs was transcribed having read text files and listened to the tape recorders thoroughly for a general understanding. Common themes were then identified and clustered to get relevant information for the study. Thematic analysis was used to analyse data because it emphasises identifying, analysing and interpreting patterns of meaning.

Presentation of Findings

This section presents the findings on the implementation of reflective practice in the teaching of Civic Education in secondary schools in Zambia. The information has been presented using verbatim transcriptions derived from interviews and FGDs, and in line with research objectives.

Application of Reflective Practice in Civic Education Lessons

The question on the application of reflective practice as an approach in the teaching of Civic Education in secondary schools is fundamentally important and was seen as an effective strategy in teaching Civic Education. In defining what reflective practice is, this is what one teacher said:

Reflective practice is a strategy of teaching civic education as it places the learner at the center of learning and it encourages learners to apply theory into practice

In the same vein, it was revealed by one lecturer interviewed that reflective practice as a strategy adds value to the subject (Civic Education) by way of promoting a learner-centred environment. This in turn promoted independent learning, participation and formation of critical minds among the learners.

It was also noted by Lecturers, officials from Ministry of General Education (M.o.G.E) and Curriculum Development Centre (CDC) that reflective practice is a strategy where learners are guided by the teachers in a practical way especially that Civic Education required practical approaches of teaching. An official from the MoGE explained that Civic Education should take a practical approach if learners were to be useful members of society.

Civic Education teachers should use practical methods which are reflective and help promote participation and engagement among the learners as this will make the learners to think deeper beyond what is in class

This means that the aim of teaching Civic Education in secondary schools in Zambia is to develop critical minds among the learners and not necessarily teaching for the sake of it.

The Practicality of Reflective Practice in teaching Civic Education

The study also found that in as much as reflective practice was seen as significant in the teaching of Civic Education in secondary schools, more often than not the approach was rarely employed by the teachers. The focus was mainly on teaching the learners to get good grades in the examinations. This idea was reflected in the discussion with an official from the CDC had noted in the following verbatim:

Today's curriculum supports teachers to teach civic education to prepare the learners to pass the end-of year final examinations. Good grades are what the system expects from teachers

Reflective practice supports learners in engaging in educational discussions during Civic Education lessons.

Civic Education being a dynamic subject requires dynamic strategies such as reflective practice which support learners working in small groups and complement one another. Slow-learners are supported by faster learners. This therefore supports educational discussions

Reflective Practice serves as good motivation for teaching good citizenship

Reflective practice has the potential to create good motivation for learners to become productive members of society through the inculcation of relevant values, skills and dispositions. It was also clear from the interviews that Civic Education was uniquely positioned to provide opportunities for the learners to become active and informed members of society through the development of critical minds.

Reflective practice has many benefits in the teaching of Civic Education in that it helps the learners to acquire certain skills that are beneficial in their lives such as giving valid and informed arguments. This enhances patriotism and responsibility in the citizenry

Discussions of the findings

The value of using Reflective Practice in teaching Civic Education in Secondary Schools

Civic Education as defined by Ukegbu et al (2009) is about the provision of information and learning experiences aimed at equipping and empowering citizens to participate in democratic processes. To do this require that those that are teaching the subject should strive to employ approaches that are reflective in nature and reflective practice as a strategy stands out in this regard.

However, teaching Civic Education without some sort of reflection during the lessons, can be said to be limited as it does not make the learners have a critical view of issues affecting them and society.

The use of Reflective practice in teaching not only Civic Education but even other subjects is being encouraged as it enhances effective teaching. In Civic Education, this approach is viewed as significant because of the benefits that it brings to the learners in developing analytical minds. In the process of learning, learners need to think. We argue that reflective practice could make a lot of meaning in the teaching of Civic Education in secondary schools in Zambia. Furthermore, Muleya (2018) contends that Civic Education should be conceived in such way that it allows the learners to participate and have the interface with the subject being discussed. This should be in the spirit of participation and not at the mercy of teachers. In fact, the argument would also be that the task of the teachers in schools and especially those teaching Civic Education should be able to delineate new forms of pedagogy that are responsive to the new environment in schools which allow learners to engage with the subject matter.

Reflective practice is a strategy where pupils can use the acquired knowledge to solve their own problems and make reflections of what is happening in the community

The above verbatim by one of the participants is in line with the theory of Conscientisation which as a matter of fact supports the opening up of the learners to different possibilities as they learn in schools. This theory as noted by Freire (1970) has the potential to significantly influence the approach to education and serves as an inspiration to many across the world. As such, the theory resonates well with the teaching of Civic Education in that it agitates for critical awareness of the world based on the concrete experience the learners through their everyday lives.

The relevance of Reflective Practice in Civic Education

Education has always been seen in the context of liberating and empowering learners and where such a context is missing, it becomes

difficult to elicit the relevance behind learning. However, this study has established that methods which encouraged learners to think for themselves were rarely used in the teaching of Civic Education in Secondary schools in Zambia. Scholars such Grunshka, Hinde-McLeon & Reynolds (2005) argue that teaching is about learners being engaged and not being spoon-fed.

In this study, it was established that the relevance of reflective practice in Civic Education could not be over-emphasized. Participants who were interviewed continuously indicated that reflective practice was ideal for the teaching of Civic Education in secondary schools. It was clear from the FGDs that the process of reflection does generate liberating knowledge and unless and until the learners are exposed to such reflective skills during Civic Education lessons no much change of attitude and behaviour can occur in the learners. We therefore, argue that the teaching of Civic Education in secondary schools ought to give learners opportunities in which they can explore their potential and bring out their best as they learn. This view is also supported by Muleya et al (2019) who contend that Civic Education prepares citizens with vital knowledge, skills and values which enable them to contribute effectively to society's welfare. This in our argument is only feasible under conditions where teaching is done through reflective practice which is fundamentally relevant in Civic Education lessons. The relevance of reflective practice is a critical approach which cannot be ignored in Civic Education and this aspect is also being emphasised in the revised Zambian curriculum of 2015 (Bergersen and Muleya, 2019). Therefore, the study established that pockets of conservatism in the teaching of Civic Education were still prevalent which if not correctly addressed can be detrimental to the needs of the learners and society at large.

In other words, the conservative approach to Civic Education does not give space to the individual learners to explore other avenues in the quest to bring about desired results as they learn. There is limited thinking on the part of the learners which as a matter of fact negates the very essence of the theory of Conscientisation.

As such the relevance of reflective practice in the teaching of Civic Education remains the turnaround strategy in the teaching of Civic Education in schools.

The missed opportunity in teaching Civic Education in schools

In this study's findings, it was noted that in five selected schools the teaching of Civic Education was not done to promote civic engagement and support democratic and participatory governance but rather teach so that learners can pass the examinations. In short we established that reflective practice was not one of the everyday approaches employed by the teachers of Civic Education. Teachers mentioned over-enrollments, expenses attached to the use of reflective practice and limited time to cover the syllabus. However, Machila et al (2018) notes that Learners can grasp better understanding of concepts in their subjects if there are exposed to the appropriate teaching approaches.

We note that such appropriate teaching includes reflective practice which we argue in this study that it opens up the learners to many possibilities and therefore ought to be tried by teachers of Civic Education in their lessons from time to time. While we appreciate that learners ought to pass the examinations, it is also important that their passing of the examinations is commensurate with the expectations of the community on good character and responsible citizenry. Muleya (2018: 109-130) notes that Civic Education attaches meaning to the people so that citizenship is lived and experienced. It would be meaningless to talk about it if there is no link between what is learnt and what is eventually experienced in everyday life. This argument is also in line with the responses that we got from the participants in the study that Civic Education addresses a wide variety of political and governance issues as well as important social issues in many countries.

Interactivity of Reflective Practice in Civic Education Lessons

One of the key components of Civic Education is civic skills which is the ability to analyse evaluate, take and defend positions on public

issues and to use their knowledge to participate in civic and potential processes. This is only possible if the teachers of Civic Education are able to apply appropriate methods of teaching and one key method being reflective practice. Reflective practice if applied by the teachers of Civic Education in their lessons, the rate of engagement is going to be enhanced among the learners. This can also be enhanced through what Muleya (2017) states as integration of different knowledge domains in their lessons or activities (political, social, economic and cultural dimensions) to bring about the full education discussions or creating interactive sessions as the lessons are going on.

The aspect of interactivity in the Civic Education lessons comes about because learners are aware of what they need to do in those lessons. This is what the theory of Conscientisation demands that through the process of reflection, learners become aware of socio-economic injustices and unequal power structures that restrict their freedom, choices and self-determination through life experiences.

This understanding is based upon their knowledge and the applications of this knowledge to explain, evaluate and resolve a public issue depends upon the cognitive process skills of the learners. This is what constitutes the reflective practice strategy. Thus, this study is in agreement with Goldberg et al (2011); Walsh (2013) Dewey (1933) who are convinced that without an emphasis placed on a strong Civic Education and understanding of the best pedagogical practices democracy will continue deteriorating. Hence, learning is in relationship between people and environment with full participation in communities of practice and utilization of resources. The findings further suggested that Civic Education resonates well with the active methods such as debate, brainstorming, projects and group work promoted by reflective practice. These findings point to the fact that learner-centred methods and strategies which put learners at the centre of the learning process were compatible with Civic Education that promotes democratic citizenship. Citizenship Education Foundations (2012) as cited in Muleya (2015) maintained that in whatever form Civic Education curriculum must have an active element that places emphasis on learning by doing, must be

interactive through utilizing discussion and debate and be relevant by focusing on real-life issues facing the society.

Motivation behind Reflective Practice

The arguments from the findings point out that Civic Education lessons should be taught using approaches that are able to generate critical thinking among the learners. It also ought to be modelled on practices that put the learner at the centre of the teaching and learning procedures. Previous research has shown that learning environments that emphasize old styles, fact based and teacher-centred pedagogy may succeed in imparting abstract facts and skills of the sort that can be tested. However, as has been established with the findings from Australia, teacher-centred approaches do not help young citizens translate that knowledge into later civic practice (Muleya, 2015). This view is supported by Levinson (2014); Muleya (2019) who argue that active learning opportunities such as simulations, discussions and action civics that encourage learners to reflect upon their own situation and the circumstances and power structures they live in help to stimulate critical reflections that may lead to individual and community development. Civic Education must be taught in a manner that provides learners with the tools of civic knowledge, civic skills, civic virtues and civic dispositions which are important tools in the transmission of character formation and values. Learners need to experience these attributes and should be seen to be acting upon them when they are out of school in their communities. The findings in this study are consistent with the demands of the Zambia Education Curriculum Framework of 2015 that places emphasis on approaches to learning which encourages learners to think critically.

Conclusion

In this study, an attempt has been made to establish the significance of reflective practice in teaching of Civic Education in Secondary Schools in Zambia. It must be noted that reflective practice is a complex process and therefore demands a lot of effort on the part of the teachers to explore as many approaches as possible in their quest

to transfer relevant knowledge, skills and values to the learners. This demands that the teacher is well vested with appropriate pedagogy for effective teaching and learning to take place.

Recommendations

- Since Civic Education is practical in nature, there is need for the MoGE, ECZ and CDC to consider a practical assessment for Civic Education if the desired goals were to be achieved.
- There is need for secondary schools to strengthen Continuing Professional Development (CPDs) activities as a response to enhancing reflective teaching strategies in subjects like such as Civic Education.

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